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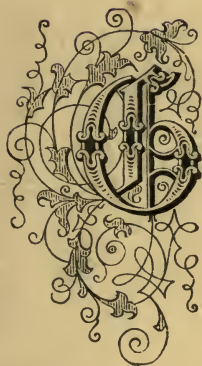
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# Goethe's Faust







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Theodore H. Hittell



# Goethe's Faust

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BY

THEODORE H. HITTELL.



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## GOETHE'S FAUST.

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OF all modern literary productions, Goethe's Faust is entitled to be called the most remarkable and the greatest. It is the master-piece not only of a great poet, but of a great nation; not only of a nation, but of an age: it is the representative of an era in the history of human progress. Like the master-pieces of former ages—like the Iliad of Homer, the Divine Comedy of Dante, the Dramas of Shakespeare—it has in its peculiar sphere no prototype. Like them it may be followed by many imitations; but like them it seems to have preoccupied its own sublime region of poesy. It shines there in the brightness of immortality, and no successor can be expected to share its preëminence or dim its unapproachable splendor.

This wonderful composition was the work of a lifetime; and of a life which not only stretched beyond the ordinary limits, but was one of the most varied in all the pas-

sions and experiences of human existence. The idea of writing it was first conceived by its illustrious author about the year 1775, while he was still comparatively but a youth; and he did not finish it till the year 1831, at the advanced age of 82. During all the intervening years, including those of his wayward but industrious youth, those of his sober-minded manhood, and those of his ripe old age; embracing the intellectual periods which found their expression in the passionate sorrows of young Werther, as well as those which produced the calm Wilhelm Meister; those which brought forth the classic *Iphigenia*, the philosophical *Metamorphoses of Plants* and the *Theory of Colors*; those which were passed in the hermitage of his own study; those which were enjoyed amongst the arts and artists of Italy, and those which were spent as a literary dictator at the most learned court of Europe, and as a minister among and a participator in the most stirring scenes of modern politics—during all these years, and from all these different provinces, the author was assiduously collecting materials for this, his “mystic, unfathomable song.” It seems never for any length of time to have been absent from his mind. Though he may have been laboring upon the other, and different, and widely separated, subjects



which enrich his voluminous works; though he may have been investigating abstract scientific propositions, or playing a part in exciting political revolutions; the Faust was ever present, forming and maturing, in the depths of his comprehensive soul. It was with him in his studies of the ancient classics; it accompanied him through the monkish chronicles of the dark ages; it strode by his side through his vast reading of mediæval literature; it went hand in hand with him through all the wide ranges of modern intellect; it came up to him in the visions of the night; it became and was a part of himself in the thoughts and deeds of the day. All art, all science, all human knowledge seem to have been put under contribution for this magnificent work; and we find it the voice and expression of the most advanced degree to which human culture has yet arrived.

The main scope of the poem, as we understand it, is the poetical representation of the struggle of the superior or cultivated human intellect against the barriers with which mere earthly existence hems it in. The argument is essentially the same which the great poets and moralists of almost every age have, under diverse forms, made their theme—the encounter between Free Will and Fate; the fight between the aspiring soul and the iron limits of neces-



sity. It is the same great problem which formed the substratum or basis upon which many of the significant fables of ancient mythologies were raised; the same which in later times, and particularly after the invigorating and awakening influence of the Reformation, assumed such gigantic proportions in theological polemics. In *Faust*, under the plastic hands of a Goethe, we have it in an entirely new and original form. Instead of drawing down a demigod, as *Æschylus* did his *Prometheus*, to be the hero in the sublime story, Goethe takes the scholar of modern times — one who is neither raised above nor sunk below us; one whom we feel to be our like and equal. Instead of the vague abstractions of the metaphysicians, the poet has thrown the whole into the concrete form; and the result has been this admirable, all-embracing dramatic poem; this masterpiece, as it may well be called, of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The old German legend of *Faust*, or, as it is more familiarly known, *The Devil and Doctor Faustus*, was in a few of its main features well suited to the purposes of the poet in his magnificent undertaking. Where it was deficient, he rejected it; and with the high prerogative of genius, he made many radical changes: much in the same way that *Shakespeare* took the re-



port of a bloody crime out of Saxo Grammaticus and transmuted it into the philosophical story of Hamlet. Goethe gives the legend an entirely new purport; he adds breadth and range to it; he clothes it in entirely new adornments, and totally changes its conclusion and signification. That he has done so is one of his great merits; one of his titles to our admiration of him as a creator, a complete master of his subject, who could mold and fashion it to his will. Nor is it any the less a merit that it was natural for him to do so. He was one of the boldest and most successful of innovators. His works abound with instances in which he exercised his privilege with an effect elsewhere unparalleled in modern literature. In his *Iphigenia*, for example, he gave an entirely new reading to a celebrated oracle of the Delphic shrine, and constructed upon such reading a poem, which might well take its place as one of the Greek classics; different from the classics, but the most genuinely classic in spirit of all modern works. Again, in science he pushed aside with an unsparing hand many of the long cherished and apparently well established theories of preceding philosophers, and opened up new and untold fields for investigation and discovery. He was the first to call in question the theory of Newton respecting the nat-

ural philosophy of light: and though the controversy which he thus originated is not yet ended, and his views may not be adopted, it is admitted that he brought to bear upon the intricate subject a greater degree of intelligence and sagacity than any other since Newton. He was the first to enunciate and develop the great theory of transformations, upon which the modern system of botany may be said to be founded; upon which, it seems probable, all science pertaining to organic forms will yet be based—thus exhibiting a grasp and power of intellect which entitle him worthy an equal rank with the most comprehensive and subtle minds known in the annals of the human race.

But it is in Faust more particularly that this gigantic genius has shown his greatest boldness and exhibited the sublimity, or, if we may be allowed the expression, the very perfection of innovation. He has taken the vulgar legend from where he found it, among the superstitions of the people, and with his mighty hand transformed it into a drama of the whole circle of human destiny; a circle which commences in the eternity before time, and leads through time into the eternity after time; or, as expressed in the poem, from Heaven, through the Earth, to Hell. The more we contemplate the extent and character

of his attempt, the more are we awed with the magnitude of his daring. It almost appears like the endeavor of a modern Titan to scale the province of omnipotence; and there are some minds — minds which are too narrow to comprehend, or too bigoted to appreciate — who have branded it as impious.

Faust, according to the legend, was a learned doctor and professor, who lived about the beginning of the sixteenth century, and taught at the City of Wittenburg, in Germany. He was born at Kündlingen, in the province of Weimar, the son of a poor husbandman; but was adopted and educated by a rich uncle, who sent him to the university. He progressed there so rapidly in the study of divinity, to which he was devoted, that when the examinations came on before the rectors and masters, it was found that none of his time were able to argue with him, or “for the excellence of his wisdom to compare with him.” With universal consent, therefore, he was made Doctor of Divinity; or, as it would be expressed in modern phrase, he graduated with the highest honors. But, continues the legend, a short time after he obtained his degree, he fell into such fantasies and deep cogitations that he became the object of mockery, and was called by the students “The Speculator,”

or, as we would now say, "The Visionary." In his vagaries he would sometimes throw the Scriptures from him, as though he despised and contemned his profession; and by degrees he began to lead a most ungodly life. He made acquaintances among and formed friendships with such as practiced devilish arts, and such as had the Chaldean, Persian, Hebrew, Arabian and Greek tongues. In connection with these he learned to use figures, characters, conjurations, incantations, and many other ceremonies belonging to the infernal arts of necromancy, charms, soothsaying, witchcraft and enchantment. He took so much delight in their books and words and names that he studied them night and day; till at length he could no longer abide being called a Doctor of Divinity, but waxed a worldly man, and named himself an astrologian and a mathematician. For a pretense sometimes he called himself a physician, and did cures with herbs, roots, waters, drinks and receipts. "And without doubt," says the conscientious chronicler, "he was also passing wise and excellent perfect in Holy Scriptures; but he that knoweth his Master's will and doeth it not, is worthy to be beaten with many stripes."

The legend goes on to state, at great length and with great particularity, that Faust, after falling from one grade of



naughty wickedness to another, at last began to commune with the lower world itself, and finally conjured up one of the imps of the Prince of Darkness, named Mephistopheles. It graphically describes how this devil appeared; first in the form of a dragon, hovering, like the witches of Macbeth, in the foul and filthy air; then as a flash of lightning; then as a globe of fire; then as a beast; and finally as a monk, in which shape he held converse with Faust. With like particularity the legend sets forth how Faust, in the depravity of his heart, wished to know the secrets of Heaven and Earth; and how, being otherwise unable to accomplish his purposes, and forgetful of his soul's sake, and contemning the commands of the Holy Mother Church, he entered into that infernal compact which has made his name immortal. By the terms of this famous stipulation, Mephistopheles was for twenty-four years to be Faust's servant; bring everything he wanted; do everything he required; at all times appear at his command in what form or shape soever he wished, and accomplish all his desires to all points in full. On the other hand, Faust bound himself at the end of the twenty-four years to belong body and soul to Lucifer; and, for confirmation of the agreement, he executed a bond to that



effect, written in blood—and a copy of the identical document is duly preserved in the history. As it presents, so far as we are informed, the only specimen of this branch of the law of contracts in existence, it may not be uninteresting to the curious to hear it. Having opened a vein and placed his blood in a saucer on warm ashes, Faust deliberately wrote as follows :

“ I, John Faustus, Doctor, do openly acknowledge with mine own hand, to the great force and strengthening of this letter, that since I began to study and speculate the course and nature of the elements, I have not found, through the gift that is given me from above, any such learning and wisdom that can bring me to my desire ; and for that I find that men are unable to instruct me further in the matter : Now have I, Dr. Faustus, to the hellish Prince of Orient, and his messenger Mephistopheles, given both body and soul, upon such conditions that they shall teach me and fulfill my desires in all things, as they have promised and vowed unto me, with due obedience unto me, according to the articles mentioned between us.

“ Further, I do covenant and grant with them, by these presents, that at the end of twenty-four years next ensuing the date of this present letter, they being expired, and I in the meantime during these said years

being served of them at my will, they accomplishing my desires to the full in all points as we are agreed; that then I give them all power to do with me at their pleasure—to rule, to send, to fetch or carry me or mine, be it either body, soul, flesh, blood or goods, into their habitation, be it wheresoever: and hereupon I defy God and his Christ, all the host of Heaven, and all living creatures that bear the shape of God; yea, all that live. And again I say it, and it shall be so. And to the more strengthening of this writing, I have written it with my own hand and blood, being in perfect memory; and hereupon I subscribe to it with my name and title, calling all the infernal, middle and supreme powers to witness of this my letter and subscription.

“John Faustus, approved in the elements and the spiritual doctors.”

Immediately after the execution of the bond, Faust entered upon the enjoyment of his privileges, and made the circuit of physical gratifications. He fared delicately; he wore costly apparel; he reveled in earthly and sensual delights; he became the companion of princes and emperors; and wherever he appeared was recognized as the gloss of fashion and the mold of form, the observed of all observers. He traveled through all the kingdoms of the

world, and even as far as Paradise, upon whose walls he saw standing the angels with flaming swords. He also visited the sun and planets; and, in all his rambles, the spirits of the air, the spirits of the earth, and the spirits of the places under the earth, were all equally subservient to his will. Even space and time were as nothing to his desires; a dragon or a magic cloak was ever ready to annihilate one, and from the other he could call up at will the beings of any age. At one time the lovely Thais, the mistress of Alexander of Macedon, reappeared and ministered to his pleasures; and at another Helen, whose beauty fired the ancient world and caused the fall of Ilion. At all times and in all places, Mephistopheles was ever at his side and ever obedient to his wishes — infinite in expedients, inexhaustible in resources. However seemingly impossible the demands, however seemingly desperate the attempt, the devil kept his contract to the letter.

Had it not been for his conscience, Faust could not have been otherwise than happy; but in all his carousals, that silent but powerful monitor was constantly upbraiding him. With every worldly wish gratified to the full, he lived a miserable and wretched life. He would willingly have repented, but his repentance was like that of Cain



and Judas; his sin was greater than could be forgiven: when he looked to Heaven, he could see no hope; nothing presented itself to his contemplation for the future but hell and the pains thereof. In answer to his inquiries he was informed that as the flint-stone in the fire burns red hot but consumeth not, so his immortal soul was condemned to everlasting pain. And when, in terror of his approaching end, he demanded of the fiend if there was indeed no hope, he was rebuffed with a foresight of his terrible doom. "Know, Faustus," replied the evil spirit, "that the condemned have neither end nor time appointed in the which they may hope to be released. If there were even hope that by throwing one drop of water out of the sea each day until it were dry; or if there were a heap of sand as high as from the earth to the heavens, that a bird carrying away but one corn in a day — if even at the end of this so incalculable labor they might yet hope God would have mercy on them, they would be comforted; but there is no hope that God ever thinks of them, or that their howling will ever be heard. Yea, it is as impossible for thee to escape the wrath to come as it is impossible for thee to remove the mountains, or to empty the sea, or to count the drops of rain that have fallen from heaven unto this day, or tell

what there is most of in the world. Yea, and as impossible as it is for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, even so impossible it is for thee, Faustus, and the rest of the condemned, to come again into the favor of God ; and thus, Faustus, thou hast heard my last sentence, and, I pray thee, how dost thou like it ? ”

As the appointed term drew nearer and nearer toward its close, the unhappy Faust became, in the quaint words of the legend, “like a taken murderer or thief, the which, finding himself guilty in conscience before the Judge, fears every hour to die. He was grieved, and in wailing spent his time; he went talking to himself, wringing of his hands, sobbing and sighing; his flesh fell away and he became lean and haggard, and kept himself close; neither could he abide, see or hear of Mephistopheles any more.” At last, when the full time was about to expire, he repaired to a public house in the village of Rimlich, a half mile from Wittenburg; and, after calling his student friends about him, and bidding them all farewell, “it happened,” says the legend, “that between twelve and one of the clock at midnight there blew against the house a mighty storm of wind, as though it would have blown the foundations thereof from their places. Hereupon the students began to fear, and left



their beds; but they would by no means stir from their chambers, though the host ran out of doors, thinking the house would fall. The students, who lay next the hall wherein Dr. Faustus was, soon heard a mighty noise and hissing, as if it had been full of snakes and adders; and presently the hall door flew open and they heard Faustus imploring for help, and crying murder! murder!! but it was with a smothered voice, and very hollow; and shortly afterward it died away, and they heard him no more. In the morning, as soon as it was light, they plucked up courage to go into the hall, where they had left Faustus; but he was not there. Instead of him, they found the floor sprinkled with his blood, and his brains cleaving to the walls. The devil had beaten him from one side against another: in one corner lay his eyes, and in another his teeth — a fearful and pitiful sight to behold."

Such was the plot of the old legend of Faust. It is easy to see that it was a monkish or priestly invention; originating in the age of the Reformation, at a time when the spirit of inquiry was becoming dangerous to the established order of things, and evidently intended to repress it. It was the thirst of knowledge which is represented as misleading Faust; not ambition, nor avarice, nor lust, nor inher-

ent vice. It is also worthy of remark that the scene of the tragedy was Wittenburg, with its schools and professorships, celebrated for ages as the foster mother of philosophy. It will be recollected that Hamlet, the most philosophic of Shakespeare's characters, had studied in Wittenburg; and Horatio, whose philosophy had apparently attempted all things, both of heaven and earth, is repeatedly asked, "And what make you from Wittenburg, Horatio?" Thus the legend of Faust, however it may have originated, had a didactic purpose. It was, so to speak, the expression of the religious conservatism of the age against the supposed heretical spirit of reawakened inquiry, which was gradually overturning the régime of the old dogmas. It was essentially a religious lesson; and there can be no doubt that it was implicitly believed by the superstitious of those days. The common people, among whom it passed current and who shuddered over its descriptions of the place of torments, were not intelligent enough to perceive its grossness and inconsistencies. The unpardonable sin which it portrayed, was the thirst of knowledge; a thirst which we of this age would term one of the most commendable of human desires. The Mephistopheles was the old-time fire and brimstone imp, with forked tail and cloven



foot; the incidents were low and insignificant; Faust a vulgar voluptuary, almost brutal in his sensualities; and the catastrophe a mere jumble of blood and murder; striking on account of the horrible picture it presented to the imagination, but absurd in all its connections and antecedents. As a whole, the legend was a creature of the most debased superstition; an offspring of the old night, which brought it forth and to which it properly belonged.

In the poem of Goethe, on the other hand, the story assumes an entirely new aspect, and bears with it a significance of which any version of the old legend would have appeared incapable. As Shakespeare raised Hamlet into the highest regions of what may be called concrete philosophy, so Goethe elevated the gross and coarse legend of Faust from its native bed on the lower stratum of popular superstition to the summit of intellectual greatness. The process was much the same in both works; but Goethe, whose plan was more comprehensive, found it necessary to remodel the popular story in almost all its details; to prune it of its grossness and to infuse into it a spirit altogether unknown to the legend itself. Little of the legendary characteristics remains in the poem, except the names of the chief personages and the idea of a compact with the spirit of dark-

ness. This fragmentary skeleton the poet has enlarged; turned to new purposes; added new members; clothed with the weavings of his own genius: and thus changed, he presents it to us in the form and with the merits of a new creation. Of all the great works which the moderns have produced there is perhaps no other so entirely original, so completely the product of its author alone.

Under the hands of Goethe, Faust becomes, instead of the vulgar voluptuary and sensualist of the legend, the representative of the aspiring human soul; hemmed in by untoward circumstances, but manfully struggling for light and freedom. And Mephistopheles, instead of the sooty imp of Lucifer, becomes the genuine, veritable devil of the times; the spirit of evil in the shape in which he now appears. The modern devil has discarded horns, claws, tail, fire and brimstone; and he now wears the dress and has the manners of a gentleman. Upon him too has the progress of culture had its influence; so much so that, in his new and improved condition, even his own creatures do not at first recognize him. The only thing that indicates his relationship with the old-time devil is the cloven foot, which he cannot lay aside; but, that this may not offend or injure his prospects in society,

he wears false calves and stuffed shoes. He objects to being called Satan; this name, he says, has been too long written in the story books. He prefers the title of Baron; and he claims to be a cavalier like other cavaliers: in other words, he is now a man of the world, and whatever may be the fashion of the time he will wear its garb.

Not only are the characters changed, but the scope, intent and object of the legend are transformed. Instead of descriptions of the infernal regions, and their different wards and compartments; instead of inventories of the various fiends and their manner of tormenting the condemned; instead of flat, stale and unprofitable conversations, which there needs no ghost come from the grave to tell us; and instead of unmeaning journeys through the air—we have, in the poem, a most sublime statement of the great, the all-important questions of human destiny; and a development and working out of the problem in a manner so masterly that few as yet have been able to recognize, and perhaps none to fully appreciate its real grandeur. Some of the most intelligent readers have entirely misunderstood it. Coleridge even used the expression, "transcendental nonsense and magic-lantern pictures," in reference to it. But a faithful study of the



poem, and a disposition to look beneath the surface, indicate that the poet had a great meaning; and when the key of interpretation is properly applied, the whole structure arises before the mind in magnificent proportions and matchless symmetry. Little less indeed could have been expected of a work of which Carlyle well said, "it was matured in the mysterious depths of a vast and wonderful mind, and bodied forth with that truth and curious felicity of composition in which Goethe is generally admitted to have no living rival."

To properly interpret and understand the poem, it should be recollected that Goethe himself wrote a short criticism, or rather explanation, of Hamlet; one of the briefest but certainly the most sensible of the thousands of pages written on that subject. He there points out the key which at once opens the significance of Hamlet, and at the same time affords an example of the manner in which great poems should be studied. It is impossible to read that criticism without feeling that Goethe heartily approved of Shakespeare's plan of working out his play upon the basis of one or more fundamental ideas; and we may be certain that in his own work he not only had a great purpose underlying the whole, but also that he placed the key or keys to unlock and explain it in the poem



itself. Indeed, the idea of locking up the secrets or meanings of things, to be opened only by those who procured the keys, was a favorite of Goethe's. He looked upon Nature as a great secret locked forever to those who could not read her language, but open to all who used the proper key. Again, in his *Wilhelm Meister*, a strange casket, which is found locked and which cannot be opened until the lost key be found, plays an important part. Even in this poem, a key leads Faust the way that he should go through the nether regions. And so throughout all that class of his writings, which admit of such a treatment, we find that Goethe requires the reader to search beneath the surface. And that the diligent inquirer will be amply repaid, any one may answer who has ever understood a page of him who "never wrote a line without a meaning, or many lines without a deep and true meaning."

When we come to examine Goethe's *Faust* in this spirit, we notice that it is a dramatic poem not intended for the stage, and much of it not adapted for visual representation. The action extends over the period commencing with Faust's first incantations, or calling of spirits from the vasty deep, and ending with the ascent of his soul into Heaven. The scene is laid variously at Wittenburg, Leipsic, the Hartz

Mountains, the Alps, the moving court of a wandering Emperor, and the Ocean beach ; but, by a sort of magic annihilation of time and space, and by means of interludes, we are also called upon to thread the mazes of mythological Hades, classic Hellas, the regions of Gothic romance ; and at last we have a glimpse of Paradise, and hear the hymns of the seraphic choirs in the beatific Presence. This vast circle of subject is amazing to contemplate, and it would seem an almost impossible thing to embrace its distinct and various parts in one complete whole. To understand how this has been done, and why such an immense field has been presented, we must endeavor to find the main purpose or great underlying idea.

In looking for this we observe that the poem consists of two parts, and that it is preceded by a short prelude and a prologue. In the prelude the poet, with a few masterly touches, indicates the nature and difficulties of his undertaking, and the vastness of his scheme. In the prologue the scene is changed from earth to Heaven, and the reader is prepared for the momentous questions to be presented by the introduction of the Archangels and the Lord holding converse with Mephistophiles. The hint of this sublime scene is taken from the book of Job ; and the ex-



change of a few words shows us, not only that the same God conceived by the divine author of Job is meant, but that Mephistopheles is the same spirit of evil represented in that by Satan. Times have changed, but the devil is the same, differing only in the disguises which he finds it convenient to assume. In Job, it will be borne in mind, Satan sneeringly asks, "Doth Job fear God for naught? Hast thou not made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath, on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land." ( In Faust we find the same sneering disposition of the evil spirit; but the subjects of his fault-finding are different. Instead of the simple days of the patriarchs, we have now the complications of modern civilization. Faust is a modern Job, a faithful servant of the Lord; but, like the man of Uz, he too must go through the furnace of suffering and temptation. The Lord of Job said to Satan, "Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life." The Lord of Faust says to Mephistopheles, "So long as he lives upon the earth it is not forbidden thee to mislead him." And here we have the fundamental argument of Faust: the dark strivings of the earnest modern soul under the machinations and seductions of

the modern spirit of evil; or, in other words, of the devil of an advanced period of civilization. We observe also that this modern Satan is not only not forbidden the presence of the Lord, but, like the Satan of Job, is made use of for a purpose—he is a part of the vast plan of a beneficent God. In reality, Mephistophiles is only the obverse side of the character of Faust, just as the ghost is a part of the character of Hamlet; but for the purposes of the poets it was necessary to represent them by distinct forms. To properly understand either Faust or Hamlet, this great fact of the metaphysical identity, so to speak, of the main personages, distinct, yet the same or parts of the same, must be borne in mind. In Job the idea is similar; but the nature of that sublime production did not admit of the visible separate appearance of Satan in the presence of the suffering patriarch; and accordingly, though the whole argument of the Sacred Book is the struggle against Satan; and though we continually feel what powerful assaults he is making in all that Job says, yet Satan himself, as a distinct personage, except in the first two chapters nowhere appears.

With this explanation of the great underlying idea of Faust, as dimly indicated in the prologue, we proceed to the poem



itself, and seek the reason why it is divided into two separate parts. We observe that these distinct parts are so different in style, purport and character, that at first sight they seem to have no relation to or connection with each other. The first part is generally considered plain enough, having a regular plan, and the different parts fitting together and forming a consistent and easily comprehended whole. It makes a story, and a very fine story, of itself; and if the author had intended nothing more than a mere play for the sake of the play alone, Faust would have ended with it. But Goethe did not intend a mere play; he had a magnificent plan, a portion of which (that which he developed in the first part) could be struck off with comparative rapidity; but the other portion, that which is shadowed forth in the second part, was the most difficult of all literary undertakings. It did not appear completed, as we said before, until nearly sixty years after the plan of the whole was formed, and more than forty years after the first part had been given to the world. And when it did appear, and from that time to this day, it has been a matter of contention with many critics even in Germany, whether, with all its brilliant passages, it is not in general a tissue of mysticism and absurdity.

The difference of the two parts is hinted at very early in the poem by the expression of Faust that two souls dwell in his breast, which strive to separate one from the other; the one binding him to the world, the other struggling above the things of earth. And again, when Faust and Mephistopheles are about to set forth in company to examine and see and feel what the life of man really is, Mephistopheles promises to show Faust first the little and then the great world. It is the first of these, the little world, the world of the senses and feelings—the story of that one of his two souls which binds him to physical existence—that is bodied forth in the first part of the poem. In the second part we have the story of the second soul—that which lifts itself above the senses into the world of intellect and art. To borrow the language of German metaphysics, the former is the subjective, the latter the objective world. In the first part there is exhibited the most terrible passion; in the second, merely intellectual enthusiasm. In the first part Faust woos and wins and ruins Margaret, the purest and fairest of her sex, the representative of earthly or physical beauty and affection; in the second he woos the mere shade of the Grecian Helen, which is conjured up out of the classic world of the past, and which stands here



as the type of spiritual or intellectual beauty. In the first part Faust's interests and endeavors are confined and limited; the theme is chiefly love and sorrow, subjects comparatively easy of representation; in the second part Faust appears almost another being, and in an entirely different sphere; the range of his interests and endeavors stretches out to the infinite; the sun rises as it were upon another world; everything is exalted and betokens a higher sort of existence; and instead of Faust's study and Margaret's chamber, and the witches of the Brocken, we have the court of the Emperor, the Thessalian fields, the demi-gods of the classical and romantic worlds, and the boundless ocean. In the first part Faust's desires would seem to have extended little beyond his passion for Margaret; in the second part he not only calls upon the whole world of art to minister to his desires, but he even seeks to lay down laws for nature. In the first part Mephistopheles is all-powerful to destroy and embitter; in the second he finds himself out of his element and can only play a subordinate role; and in the end, instead of the beating out of brains which plays so important a figure in the legend, Faust's soul entirely escapes him, and rises purified and disenthralled into Heaven.

In the first part Faust is introduced in

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his narrow Gothic chamber, summing up his causes of dissatisfaction with life in somewhat the same style as Hamlet in his famous soliloquy. Like Hamlet, he contemplates suicide as a convenient mode of making his quietus, and in fact raises the poisoned chalice to his lips; but it happens to be Easter morning, and the Christian hymns which he hears celebrating the rising of the Savior of mankind, arrest his purpose and awaken new hopes in his bosom. Hitherto he has been a recluse and a student; but now he goes forth to witness the festivities of the people who enjoy themselves, each according to his own fancy, in the Easter season. Faust would also fain enjoy, but he cannot: the recluse and the student still hang about him; and as he turns away in the dusky evening to return dissatisfied to his chamber, he becomes aware of the presence of a strange black dog, which frisks around, joins him, follows him home, stretches behind his fireplace, and finally swells out and transforms himself into his true nature of Mephistopheles, the evil spirit, the spirit that denies and misleads. It will be observed that this impersonation of evil is not conjured up like the devil of the legend; but comes of his own accord, as Satan crept unbidden into Eden. As has been intimated before, he is the reverse side of

Faust's own character, the impersonation of a principle which exists only in the mind, or at most operates only through the mind.

Mephistopheles soon makes himself known; shows that he has been invisibly present with Faust in all his discontent and despair; convinces him of his genuine diabolic character, and finally proposes and procures the infernal compact, by the terms of which he is to become the servant of Faust and minister to all his desires in this life, in consideration that in the after life Faust shall be his bondsman. The bargain being struck and properly nominated and authenticated in the bond, Faust hurries away from the scenes of his sorrows, and he and Mephistopheles go forth to make the best of existence as they shall find it. They dress in courtly style, with plumes in their caps and swords at their sides; and as a means of locomotion Mephistopheles spreads forth his cloak, upon which, with the ease of wishing and the rapidity of thought, they are carried through the air whithersoever they will.

They make their first study of human life in a famous drinking cellar in Leipsic, where Mephistopheles plays magical tricks upon the assembled toppers, and soon sets them together by the ears: a broad vein of humor runs through the scene; but this

phase of life, this low kind of sensual enjoyment, this spectacle of the play of the grosser appetites, is distasteful to Faust—it could not well have been otherwise; and with a feeling of disgust he hurries away from it.

The next study is of that higher kind of sensual life, to the influence and power of which all men are more or less subject—love, the tender passion. To render Faust the more susceptible, he is induced to drink a juice, brewed by a disgusting hag, a potion well known to the tempter, and which has evidently availed for the devil's peculiar purposes many times before. The property of this potion is to make every woman appear a Helen in Faust's eyes; and thus prepared, he meets Margaret—the pure, guileless, innocent and lovely Margaret—whom he woos, wins, and wrongs. The scenes in which the lovers appear, exhibiting the rise and progress of their passion, and the deepening of the colors of this part of the story, from the rosy tints of the first confessions of affection into the blackness of utter and hopeless despair, are among the most powerful of tragic delineations. And with the denouement of this entirely earthly or sensual passion of Faust's, the first part of the poem ends. It is observable that there is no division of this part into separate acts:



the scenes follow one another as parts of one and the same great act, except the concluding spectacles, where Margaret, under condemnation of death for infanticide, is represented in prison, a maniac; and where her final salvation, and a life and love beyond what we have witnessed, is significantly foreshadowed — this takes the form of a dream and is given as an interlude.

In the second part Faust appears to have entered into an entirely new existence, in which all that has preceded seems to be forgotten or ignored, as if it had had no lasting effect upon him. The sun rises upon the morning twilight of a new world; and Faust, who awakens as if from a Lethæan dream, is surrounded and ministered upon by a chorus of delicate spirits, of whom the nimble Ariel is the chief. This, as we understand it, is the introduction into an intellectual world totally distinct from the sphere of the first part. We detect this also in the words of Faust, which indicate the transposition from the subjective to the objective condition: in other words, Faust now begins to live not so much in himself as in the outer world. The scene very appropriately opens among the Alps; in those sublime regions where nature displays herself in her grandest manifestations, and man most readily feels

his insignificance. Here Faust gives himself up to the influences of the spectacle; beholds the coming on of the sun, the light of the world, and watches its rays gilding one after the other the far mountain-tops and gradually descending into the valleys, until all are bathed in the glories of the new-born day. This magnificent picture forms a grand opening for the new scenes of the drama.

We are next presented (and here the plot of the second part begins) with the court of an Emperor. It is, however, not the Charles V. of history, but a mere tyro in the art of government. It is one who little regards the welfare of his people; turns a deaf ear to the disorders of his empire; seeks his own pleasures; wishes only to be amused, and listens rather to the jests of his fool than the complaints of his subjects. It is a picture of the greater world; the world as it is, thrown into this form only because most convenient for the purposes of the poet. Not that the Emperor becomes an important personage in the drama; but his weakness and love of shows afford an opportunity for the development of the story, and the visible representation, by way of masquerades, spectacles and interludes, of what otherwise could not have been dramatically expressed.



We have already adverted to the very marked differences between the two parts of the poem; the statement of those differences implies that there are some similarities. And here we notice in the first act of the second part, as a counterpart of the Easter festivities which figure at the beginning of the first part, the introduction of the Carnival, with its eccentricities and masquerading extravagances. The Emperor in his love of amusement gives himself up to the spirit of the hour; and Mephistopheles, who finds means to assume the guise and place of the court fool, soon manages to ingratiate himself into favor, and to take rank at the imperial court as a chief friend and counselor, a worthy minister of such a monarch.

Mephistopheles being thus established in the royal household, introduces his master Faust, first as a spectator, and then as an actor in the Carnival. We are now presented with a series of magnificent spectacles, commencing with those in which the more primitive species of purely intellectual manifestations are represented under various symbolical and mythological forms; then running through different stages of intellectual or poetical progress, and ending with the unequalled interlude, called the Helena, which constitutes the entire third act. The manner in which, out of



the Emperor's luxurious ease and love of amusement, the desire to behold the famous Helen of Grèce takes its rise; and the means made use of to conjure up the lovely shade; the powerlessness of the modern Mephistopheles to deal with the creations of the ancient classic world; the descent of Faust into the nether regions of mythology; his success; the appearance of Helen in pantomime; and the effect of it all upon Faust, who much to the dissatisfaction of Mephistopheles is carried away by a suddenly conceived passion for this royal, all-famous beauty of the world—all are delineated with the most consummate art.

The pantomime of Helen, which may be likened in some respects to the dumb-show preceding the interlude in Hamlet, introduces the element of Faust's newly awakened passion. He becomes enraptured with the form which for a moment coquettes in her immortal beauty before his eyes; and he is now possessed with the all-absorbing desire and determination to recall the real Helen, in the spirit as well as in the form, from the far depths of the Profound. It was only to amuse the Emperor that she was in the first place evoked; now Faust seeks her for himself. It was the mere shade that appeared before; now the real Helen must be resur-

rected. But in this new undertaking Mephistopheles is even less potent than in the pantomime scenes; and a new spirit, the Homunculus, a demon resembling the Diable Boiteaux of Le Sage, has to be created to lead the way through the classical Hades to the eternal abode of the daughter of Jove. The composition of Homunculus in the laboratory; his interpretation of Faust's dream of Leda and the swan, or the origin of Helen; his taunting speeches to Mephistopheles; his descent with Faust and Mephistopheles into the classic infernal world; their meeting with the griffins and sphinxes, which favor Faust but frown upon Mephistopheles; Faust's communications with Chiron, the centaur, who was teacher of the Argonauts, and who describes from actual knowledge the characteristics of those demi-gods; the conversations with the old Greek philosophers, Thales and Anaxagoras, representatives of the Neptunic and Plutonic theories of cosmogony; the visit to the grim Nereus, the sea god; the unmasking of the inconstant Proteus; and the coming of the well-beloved Galatea, drawn upon her chariot of shell through the ocean waves—all these various scenes, which represent the progress of Faust's intellectual culture, are portrayed with a delicacy, and yet a strength and meaning,

which are in vain sought in any other modern reproductions of mythological subjects.

Faust has now advanced far enough in his objective cultivation to appreciate and enjoy the highest culture; and this is presented before us in the living, breathing, speaking form of Helen; and thus we see her in the celebrated interlude of the *Helena*. She makes her appearance before the palace of Menelaus, in Sparta, at the time of the return of the Greeks from the siege and overthrow of Troy. Mephistopheles, however, who has borrowed the form of Phorcyas, one of the classical witches soon induces her to believe that she has been devoted by the Greeks to a bloody sacrifice; and under this apprehension she consents to fly from the threatened doom. No sooner has she spoken her willingness to escape than, by a sudden change of scene, she and a chorus of captive Trojan women, who accompany her as attendants, are transported to Faust's castle, a structure of the middle ages, situated behind the northern mountains. Here she is offered protection, and a kingdom—in other words: at the revival of learning after the lapse of the dark ages, the classic culture is welcomed with open arms. And now we have Faust's high-toned courtship of the royal beauty; their union; the birth of Euphorion, or romantic poetry; his



mounting of the heights; his attempts to fly, and his Icarian fate; and finally, as a conclusion of this long series of pictures, the departure of Helen, who with a farewell kiss, embracing Faust, disappears, leaving her garments in his arms. These garments at once dissolve into clouds; surround Faust; lift him into the ether, and bear him away with them; while Mephistopheles lays aside the mask of Phorcyas and steps forward as if to comment and moralize upon the play.

In the beginning of the fourth act—for, as we said before, the Helena constitutes the entire third act—we are supposed to have left the classical world behind us. We now behold a strange cloud, which is seen to come over toward the pinnacle of a mountain, where it rests for a moment, opens its folds, and Faust steps forth; after which, again rising, it floats off, assuming different shapes, and finally settles in the far east, formless and magnificent like a distant iceberg. This significant cloud, as can easily be gathered from the plot, was once the garments of the Grecian Helen; in other words, it represents the rhetoric of the classic culture, all that Helen left when she returned again into the bosom of the Past.

As Faust stands upon the mountain—and here, as has been already intimated,

we have evidently arrived at a much newer degree of culture — a seven-leagued boot gropes its way up toward him, and presently a second one follows; they bring Mephistopheles, who descends from them; after which the boots hurry away and are seen no more. After they have served the purposes of the skeptic doubt and denial, these monsters and all they represent vanish. The scene, which now takes place between Faust and Mephistopheles, resembles the temptation described by the Evangelist; the evil spirit points out and offers all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; but Faust, cultivated as he now is, rejects the offer and suddenly becomes animated with the new and magnificent idea of restraining the inroads of the ocean, which he beholds encroaching upon the land, and winning for himself a realm in the reclaimed territory—a poetical conception pregnant with meaning and unsurpassed for sublimity. To prepare the way for this grand project, the Emperor is again introduced, but in an altered condition from that in which we first saw him. Since that time his concerns have fared badly. In the beginning of his intercourse with Mephistopheles, being sadly in want of the wherewithal to maintain his authority and support his expensive love of shows, the latter invented paper money, the appearance of



value without the substance; and for a while all went well. But this scrip, this at that time new invention of the devil, was soon found not to be a genuine circulating medium; there was no gold in the imperial exchequer to redeem it; the cheat and delusion was soon exposed; everything has again fallen into disorder; and, to make all worse, a new Emperor has now been chosen; rebellion stalks abroad, and loyal and disloyal forces confront each other in the imminent deadly field. This conjuncture of affairs presents the proper moment for the adventurers, Faust and Mephistophiles, to advance: they offer their services to the Emperor; enter the lists on his side; fight his battles and overthrow his enemies. The spoils are immense; and in the distribution of them, Faust, as the reward of his assistance, receives a grant of the ocean strand, which thus becomes his own to reclaim and possess.

Between the end of the fourth and the beginning of the fifth act, a great space of time is supposed to have intervened, during which Faust has succeeded in dyking out the ocean and reclaiming his territories. From the balconies of his palace, which he has built in his newly made ground, he looks abroad over a wide prospect of land and sea, and can call it all his own — all except the cottage, chapel and

garden of Philemon and Baucis, a poor and pious old couple, which impede his prospect and are an eye-sore to him. The ringing of their chapel bell is particularly annoying, as it reminds him that the continuity of his possessions is not unbroken. He would willingly purchase, but the old couple will not sell; and it seems that nothing will induce them to give up their patriarchal possessions and beloved linden trees. And now, like Ahab, King of Samaria, who lusted after the vineyard of his neighbor Naboth, Faust lusts after the garden of Philemon; and like Jezebel, the wicked Queen, who caused Naboth to be stoned till he died, and presented her lord with the coveted estate, Mephistopheles finds means to burn the cottage of Philemon to the ground, and presents to his master the unobstructed view. But here the parallel ceases; here Faust rises in the majesty of his manhood and the perfection of his culture; for, however much annoyed he has been by the neighborhood of the uncompromising old couple, he indignantly disowns the robbery and curses the wanton destruction of their possessions. Here he stands justified before us, a noble spectacle, a just man. To this excellence has his intellect advanced — that it has reached and assimilated the highest and noblest principles of morals as a part



of itself. Farther than this, man can not go; it is the last step of intellectual progress; and accordingly, his work of development being done, Faust's term of existence draws on apace. The ailments of extreme age beset him, and Care blows her withering and blinding breath; but he still takes an animated part in the labors of firmly establishing the new realms, which he has gained from the ocean; and he fondly looks forward to the time when they shall become the free and happy home of future millions, to whom he devotes them. All this constitutes a sublime picture of benevolence and humanity, the bloom and flower of all the objective culture, whose strange history we have thus been following.

We now come to the last, dread, inevitable hour. It will have been observed that, in the compact with the evil spirit, according to the poem, there was no term of life agreed upon, as in the legend; the condition simply was that Mephistopheles might claim his pledge when Faust should say to the passing moment. "Stay, thou art beautiful!" in other words, whenever he should feel a pleasure and enjoyment in life. And here, at last, in the fruition of his strivings; in the contemplation of the conquests he has made from the ocean, the emblem of the infinite; in the joyful and glorious an-

icipation of the immortal reward of his widely benevolent and humane undertakings—here, at last, he feels that he enjoys; and he exclaims to the moment, “Stay, thou art fair!” And with these words, which Mephistopheles, with all his proffered pleasures, could not wring from him, and which are called forth only by the enjoyment of what of good and great he has himself accomplished, he expires.

In all this second part of the poem, which, as we observed before, is an attempt to represent under visible forms intellectual or spiritual culture, everything necessarily takes a symbolical or allegorical form; and the story, or series of stories, illustrative of the character and purposes of art, science and morals, are shadowed forth in the most subtle but masterly pictures. To adequately describe in prose, if they could at all be described in prose, the numberless meanings that are conveyed to the studied mind by this matchless poetry, would require commentary after commentary. It is with a lavish hand that the poet has scattered the treasures of his gigantic genius through every scene, and throughout the whole poem kept steadily in view the sublime conclusion. For, from the beginning to the end, the general plan and purport of the whole was ever present to the poet; and every part has been worked



out in view of the final justification and salvation of the soul. From the beginning of the poem, indeed, it might have been anticipated that Faust's end would be far different from the bloody catastrophe depicted in the legend. It might have been foreseen that in the providence of the Lord, described in the prologue, the struggling soul would in the end rise superior to the spirit of evil. Tried in the hottest fires of tribulation, the earnest soul is destined for immortality, not death. And here, accordingly, when Faust expires, happy in the consciousness and satisfaction of his good works; though, by the strict letter of his compact, Mephistophiles may claim him, and marshals his minions to seize the soul as it issues from its mortal frame, his efforts are in vain. All are crowded aside by the angels of light, in the midst of whom his spirit, divested of all earthliness, rises into a blessed eternity. The gates of Heaven are thrown open; and the kindred spirit of the pure and angelic Margaret comes forward to welcome and minister forever upon the noble but sorely-tried character which in life she loved. The power of poetry seems to have reached its acme in these scenes at the close of the poem. Nothing perhaps in the whole range of poetic literature excels the last few pages, particularly

the grateful outpourings of the spirit of Margaret in Heaven, the poetical representation, if we may so term it, of Christian redemption.

It will thus be seen, even from this brief and necessarily imperfect sketch of the poem, that the subject, as Goethe has treated it, is one of the most deeply interesting and important within the whole scope of human endeavor. As it has been somewhere said that there is nothing that the mind of man can conceive, however shadowy, which literature will not attempt to describe or portray, however difficult; so we look upon this magnificent poem as the attempt, and we believe the successful attempt, to represent this most shadowy and difficult of subjects — the struggle of the soul of man in its aspirations toward spiritual light. It is a subject which can be adequately represented only by poetry, and perhaps only by poetry of symbolical or figurative character. It is the attempt to represent by poetic figures and light, delicate suggestive symbols, great moral and metaphysical truths — truths toward which morals and metaphysics, as sciences, tend and point, and for the sake of which alone they are valuable; but truths which, as mere sciences, they fail and must ever fail to express.











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